

# Fire and Iceland

— Case 70 —

**I**t took 103 years for the facts about the Jensen case to fully emerge ... the wait was totally worth it!

The name “Indridi Indridason” might seem strange to most of our readers, but for a period of five years, this young man was the best-known medium throughout his native Iceland. So varied, prolific, and amazing were the manifestations of his power that a special committee of highly respected professionals was formed to study him.

The committee was called The Experimental Society and its 70-plus members included a professor of theology at the University of Iceland and a newspaper editor who later became Prime Minister of the country. In addition, Dr. G. Hannesson, an honored scientist who was appointed Professor of Medicine at the University of Iceland, studied Indridason over several months. Despite his initial skepticism, Hannesson concluded by stating his “firm conviction that the phenomena are unquestionable realities.”<sup>1</sup>

So meticulous was the Experimental Society that they had a house designed and built in Reykjavik that featured living quarters for Indridason and a secure hall for séances. The hall was generally filled with up to 100 observers, even though attendance was by invitation only. Much of his mediumship was physical (involving lights, levitations, and such) but there were some mental phenomena, *i.e.* information presented from inexplicable sources.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the most written about mental phenomena of Indridason’s brief career concerned a spirit who told the séance audience about a fire taking place in Copenhagen. These events took place on November 24, 1905,

and, on their own, do argue strongly for the Survival hypothesis. Information uncovered in 2008, however, raises the case to an entirely different level.

In brief, the events of 1905 unfolded as follows. Around 9 p.m. the medium began to speak as a spirit claiming to be a deceased man named Jensen who said that he had been to Copenhagen and observed a fire raging in a factory there. About an hour later, Jensen came through once more and stated that the fire was under control.

Three of the witnesses have given public testimony to these facts and, within a day, a record was entrusted to the Bishop of Iceland to keep until these statements might be confirmed. Copenhagen is about 1300 miles distant from Reykjavik and, at the time of the séance, there was neither telephone nor telegraph service between the two cities. It was thought that the fire might be reported in a newspaper when it arrived by ship from Copenhagen.

When the paper did arrive, it contained a story confirming the four facts given in the séance. There was one large fire in Copenhagen on the night of November 24<sup>th</sup>. It was in a factory on Kongensgade (a main street). It had been reported about the time given by Jensen, and was brought under control in about an hour.

Many commentators have remarked on the similarity with the famous report of Swedenborg’s announcement of the great fire in Stockholm (in 1759) while he was visiting Gothenburg, some 245 miles away. Swedenborg, did not claim that that specific piece of information came from a spirit, only that he had seen a vision, so his experience is not evidential of Survival. Also, there was a strong

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<sup>1</sup> Hannesson, Gudmundur, “Remarkable Phenomena in Iceland,” *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, v18, 1924, p.29.

connection, at least theoretically, between the fire and the seer, as the fire consumed the homes of several of Swedenborg's friends and was not extinguished until it had almost reached his own. No such connection was apparent between Jensen and the fire on Kongensgade street — at least no connection was realized at the time.

The hand-written records of Indridason's séances filled many large volumes, all of which were presumed lost for the past half-century. In 1991, however, two of the missing volumes were discovered in the estate of a former president of the Icelandic Society for Psychical Research. Even so, it wasn't until another 17 years had passed that a professional researcher carefully examined these records. Dr. Erlendur Haraldsson<sup>2</sup>, the author of numerous books and papers on psychic phenomena, calls his unexpected discovery "perhaps the most memorable finding of [my] life."

Scattered among the thousands of notes in these records are several, hitherto unknown, facts about the earthly life of Mr. Jensen, including that:

- his first name was Emil
- he was a manufacturer
- he was unmarried
- and childless
- he died when he was "not young"
- he had several siblings
- all of whom outlived him.

Haraldsson tried to corroborate these statements by combing through old business directories, census data, and birth and burial records at the Royal Library, the National Archives, and the City Archives in Copenhagen — and he was 100-percent successful!

Here is what the professor discovered:

- there was one, and only one, Emil Jensen listed as a manufacturer in Denmark (despite Jensen being one of the most common surnames in the country)
- this Emil Jensen lived almost his entire life within a few blocks — much of the time within a few yards — of the factory that burned
- he never married
- he had no children
- he died at age 50
- he had four sisters and two brothers
- all of whom died after 1905.

Between his report of the fire and his statements about his personal life, we count 12 distinct facts<sup>3</sup> stated and confirmed by the spirit of Jensen, and no statements contradicted or challenged by careful research. This is made all the more convincing by the physical isolation of the séance from Copenhagen, the direct connection between Jensen and the location of the fire, and the lack of any link between the séance attendees and the events described or the participants therein.

We are left with no feasible conclusion other than that the spirit of Emil Jensen detected a serious fire near his earthly residences and immediately communicated that news via the most accomplished medium holding a séance at that hour.

#### **Additional Comment**

On 11 February 2015, I received an e-mail from a reader who quoted comments from a "skeptics" website claiming that "Marconi built a Wireless Telegraphy receiving station at Reykjavik in 1905. It's very likely that leading Experimental Society Member 'Björn Jonsson' as newspaper editor (and later Prime Minister of Iceland) had access to information from this Marconi station by the time of the

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<sup>2</sup> Professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Iceland.

<sup>3</sup> (1) fire in Copenhagen (2) at factory (3) start time (4) end time (5) last name (6) first name (7) occupation (8) bachelor (9) childless (10) with siblings (11) not young at death (12) survived by all siblings.

sitting.” Based only on his conjecture regarding the editor’s access, the writer concludes that “the star medium Indridi Indridason is almost certainly a fraud.” Such comments are sadly typical of the sloppy commentary and prejudiced misdirection employed so frequently by self-anointed skeptics.

It is extremely unlikely that the Copenhagen fire could have been reported via this new telegraphy station without such news reaching the ears of the Bishop of Iceland or any of the 70 esteemed members of the Experimental Society, any one of whom would surely have mentioned such information’s availability. But even if the newspaper editor did have surreptitious access to the fire reports, such information: (a) would hardly concern itself with the name of a former warehouse owner and all the details of his life and family that came through the medium;<sup>4</sup> and (b) could not have been passed into a secured séance room at the time the fire was reported and again when it was brought under control.

Blyth accusations of fraud are made so much easier when all of the participants have departed this realm. Nevertheless, it is more than misleading to single out the medium when any scam would have to involve the future Prime Minister of Iceland, the Bishop of Iceland, and numerous highly regarded citizens.

## Source

If not otherwise noted, the source of this report is an article by Erlendur Haraldsson, titled “A Perfect Case? Emil Jensen in the Mediumship of Indridi Indridason, the Fire in Copenhagen on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1905 and the Discovery of Jensen’s Identity,” in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*, volume 59, October 2011, pp. 195-223.

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[A Survival-Top-40 case](#)

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the uncertainty as to the timing of the reception of the familial information, this case has been re-evaluated and downgraded slightly.